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*Illusion de surface : percevoir la « peau » d'une sculpture*

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# The Deceptive Surface: Perception and Sculpture's "Skin"

*Illusion de surface : percevoir la « peau » d'une sculpture*

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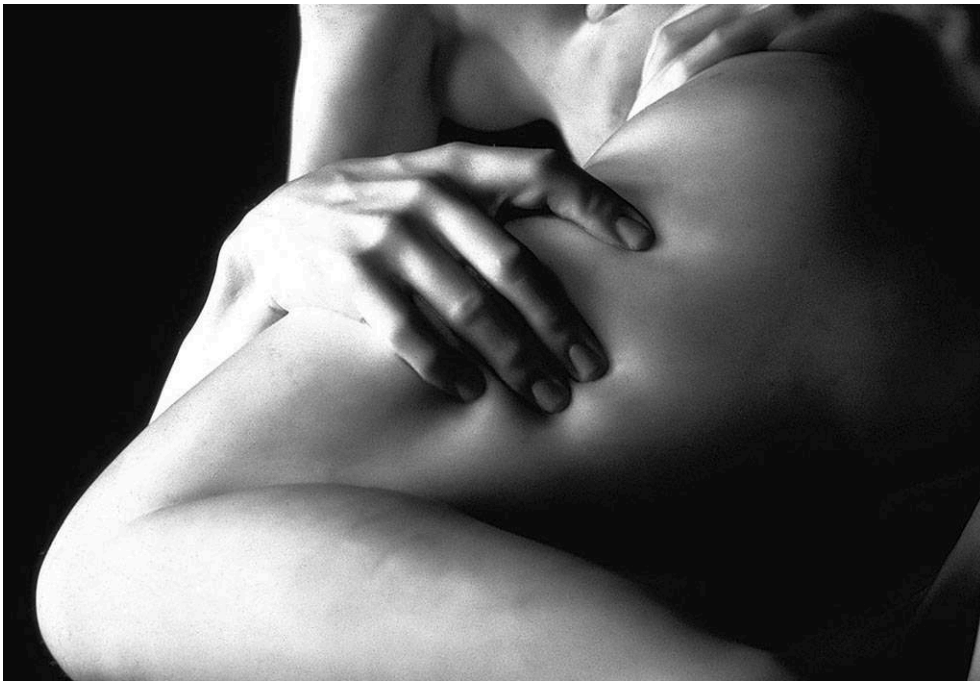
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*This paper was presented at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, as part of the symposium "Surfaces: Fifteenth - Nineteenth Centuries" on March 27, 2015. Many thanks to Noémie Étienne, organizer of the symposium, for inviting me to participate and reflect on the sculptural surface and to Laurent Vannini for the translation of this article into French.*

- 1 Sculpture—an art of mass, volume, weight, and density. Its very solidity distinguishes it from the art of painting and was one of the reasons painting was viewed as the superior medium by artists of the Renaissance. The *paragone*, or competition between the two arts, was rooted in Leonardo da Vinci's comments, which have become something of a truism now. Painting was characterized as an intellectual craft, while sculpture was largely mechanical. Sculpting was a form of labor that generated sweat and fatigue, and the sculptor was doomed to be forever dirty, covered in marble chips and dust. Worse, his art was "not a science", for "[t]he simple measurements of members and the nature of movements and poses alone are enough for such an artist, and so, sculpture ends by demonstrating to the eye only what is what." Painting, on the other hand, was an art of illusion, for "by the power of science, demonstrates the grandest countrysides with distant horizons on one flat surface."<sup>1</sup> All this is to say, sculpture was criticized for appearing to be the thing itself and for being a medium that could be understood not just by sight, but by touch.
- 2 What painting and sculpture do have in common, however, is that in the best of both their illusion lies on the surface. Painting's strength rests on its ability to create a fictional three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane. Sculpture's illusionistic success, on the other hand—particularly sculpture of the early modern period—depends on the impression of malleability, of the transformation of marble into soft flesh. This effect was the result of the sculptor's careful manipulation of the stone surface, his skill with the tools of his trade—dramatically visible, for instance, in the dimpled thigh of Gian-Lorenzo Bernini's *Proserpina* (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1



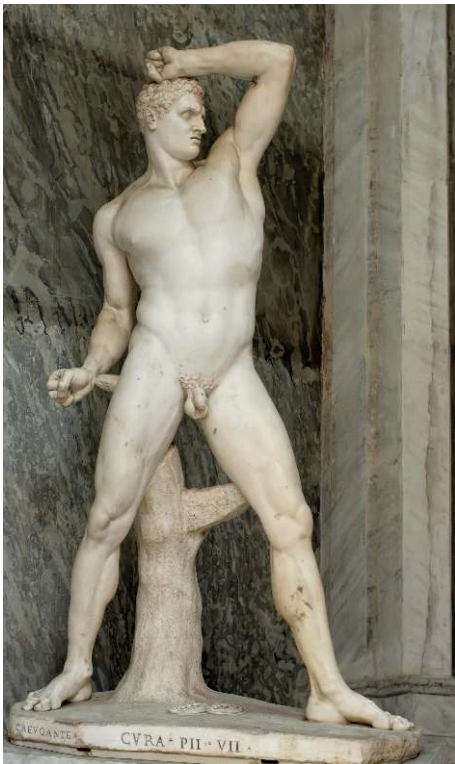
Gian-Lorenzo Bernini, *Pluto and Prosperina* (detail), 1621-22. Marble. Height 2.25 m. Galleria Borghese, Rome, Italy  
Image courtesy of the Columbia University Visual Resources Collection

- 3 A marble surface that appears to be yielding flesh, which then invites the viewer, in turn, to reach out and feel the stone beneath his fingers—this hallmark of success lasted well into the nineteenth century, and of the sculptors in the generations that followed Bernini, it was Antonio Canova who was hailed for his fine workmanship, what was known then as the “ultima mano” or “final touch” that he gave to the marble. Yet, in addition to his skill with the chisel, Canova was likewise well known for his finishing treatments.<sup>2</sup> These included the application of wax and grind water, treatments that smoothed out and stained the marble surface.
- 4 Canova and his admirers credited these treatments with giving his sculptures translucency and a “new softness”.<sup>3</sup> Not everyone, however, approved. Some of Canova’s critics considered them unnecessary, or worse yet, fraudulent. In this article, I will examine this discomfort with Canova’s “surface values.”<sup>4</sup> Viewers reacted negatively to these treatments because they found them to be deceptive. First, encaustic treatments mellowed the marble surface, giving modern works the appearance of antiquities. Second, the “reality effect” created by color threatened sculpture’s status as high art. <sup>5</sup> And third, hyper-realism also suggested that the sculpture’s surface was exactly that—that is to say, only a surface, a shell that contained the messy reality of the body.

**Fig. 2**

Antonio Canova, *Venus and Adonis*, ca. 1795. Marble. 185 x 80 x 86 cm. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, Switzerland  
Photo in the public domain  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antonio\\_canova,\\_venere\\_e\\_adone,\\_1795,\\_01.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antonio_canova,_venere_e_adone,_1795,_01.JPG)  
Accessed 31 March 2015

Fig. 3



Antonio Canova, *Creugas*, 1795-1806. Marble. Height ca. 2.25 m. Museo Pio Clementino, Vatican Museums, Vatican State  
 Photo in the public domain  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Creugas\\_Pio-Clementino\\_Inv968.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Creugas_Pio-Clementino_Inv968.jpg)  
 Accessed 31 March 2015

- 5 The number of works that received encaustic treatment at Canova's hand is significant.
- 6 The *Venus* in *Venus and Adonis*, for instance, completed in 1795, was given a slightly yellow tint (Fig. 2), and in 1799 Général Baron Thiébault was surprised that the flesh of "all" of Canova's sculptures was stained to distinguish it from drapery.<sup>6</sup> A few years later Joseph Forsyth admired the boxer *Creugas* in the Vatican, which he praised for its "waxen gloss which dazzles the eye, and gives such illusion to the high finishing, that you imagine the very texture of the skin in the marble."<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 3) In addition to yellowing the flesh of his figures, Canova sometimes tinted the cheeks and lips of his female sculptures with rouge. This was the case with all four versions of his *Hebe* as well as the first version of the *Penitent Magdalene*, currently in the Museo di Sant'Agostino, Genova.<sup>8</sup> (Figs. 4 and 5) Conservators suggest that the *Three Graces* in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the *Ideal Head* in the Ashmolean may also have been treated this way.<sup>9</sup> Since, however, Canova's works no longer bear visible traces of color, it is possible that the list is much longer.<sup>10</sup>

**Fig. 4**

Antonio Canova, *Hebe*, ca. 1800-1805. Marble. Height 161 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

Photo in the public domain

Courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

<https://hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/06.+Sculpture/49006>

Accessed 31 March 2015



Fig. 5



Antonio Canova, *Penitent Magdalene*, 1796. Marble and bronze. Height 94 cm. Museo Sant'Agostino, Genoa, Italy

Photo in the public domain

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Canova,\\_maddalena\\_penitente,\\_02.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Canova,_maddalena_penitente,_02.JPG)

Accessed 31 March 2015

- 7 Canova, however, was not alone in the use of transparent washes. A waxy patina was applied to the flesh of Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* in the seventeenth century and even the remarkable effect of Pluto's hand on Proserpina's thigh was enhanced by a stain applied to her body, dramatizing the distinction between his hard grip and her soft flesh.<sup>11</sup> In the eighteenth century, the practice was even more widespread, and sculptors such as Vincenzo Pacetti, Bartolommeo Cavaceppi, Thomas Banks, Joseph Nollekens, and even Giovanni Battista Piranesi all warmed the surface of marble with patinas made from wax, coffee, tea, tobacco, soot, stone dust and earth.<sup>12</sup>
- 8 For some artists, such as Bernini, the effect of patination was to highlight the lifelike quality of his works; for others, the aim of such techniques was to approximate the works of antiquity. In the eighteenth century in particular, ancient sculptures were discovered regularly during excavations in Rome, its surrounding countryside, and Naples, Pompeii and Herculaneum. Many pieces were only fragments and required heavy restoration; surface treatments were used on the modern additions to emulate the mellowed tone of the ancient marble. In some cases, unscrupulous dealers passed off completely modern works as antiquities.<sup>13</sup>
- 9 Of course, there is a long tradition in the history of sculpture whereby the talent of a modern sculptor is established when one of his works is taken to be ancient. In many cases, it is not just the style of carving that asserts the work's antiquity, but also its surface. Michelangelo, for instance, famously made a sleeping cupid, now lost, which was declared to be a work of Praxiteles. Although Michelangelo's cupid was made in a



classicizing style, Ascanio Condivi's biography of the artist, written in the mid-sixteenth century, pointed out that Michelangelo also treated the piece, corroding its surface so that it appeared as if it had been buried for many years.<sup>14</sup> Almost three hundred years later, viewers of Canova's works likewise understood the deceptive potential of his sculptural surface; the Baron d'Uklanski, for instance, noted that the "yellow tinge [of Canova's sculptures gave] them a colour similar to that of parian marble, and an appearance of antiques."<sup>15</sup> Often, the supposed antiquity of the weathered surface was reinforced by the thrill of discovery. If Canova's works were literally unearthed, for instance, their quality would be undeniable. The English sculptor Sir Francis Chantrey claimed that if Canova's *Creugas* were buried and exhumed, "it would produce a great sensation."<sup>16</sup> Augustus von Kotzebue was even more cunning. He wished the sculptor would bury a work that could be then "discovered by accident." "No doubt it would be believed to be a work by Phidias," he wrote, "and would lay to rest any criticisms about Canova's talent."<sup>17</sup>

Fig. 6



Antonio Canova, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, 1782. Marble. 145.4 cx 158.7 x 91.4 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, purchased with the assistance of The Art Fund  
Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

- 10 While Canova did not bury his sculptures to age them, he did collude with patrons to pass off his works as antiquities. After completing *Theseus and the Minotaur* in 1782, and before its public exhibition, the Venetian Ambassador, Girolamo Zulian, invited artists, men of letters and others to a gathering to dramatize the work's unveiling. (Fig. 6) A model of *Theseus'* head, prepared by Canova, was placed on display for the guests, all of whom:

were agreed that the cast must have been taken from a work of Grecian sculpture, and of great merit; but they were divided on what it represented, and where the

original was to be found. Some affirmed that they had seen it in such a collection;—some said it was in a different gallery;—part maintained that such a personage of antiquity was portrayed;—others asserted a contrary statement;—in short, all acknowledged the beauty of the piece was the only common sentiment which experienced no opposition. Seizing the proper occasion, when he perceived every one to be thus deeply interested in the affair, “Ebbene”, said the Ambassador, “andiamo a vederne l’originale,”—“Come, let us terminate these disputes by going to see the original.”<sup>18</sup>

- 11 The guests naturally were shocked to think that the “ancient” sculpture they had been admiring was in possession of their host and, moreover, that it was a modern work by Canova.

Fig. 7



Antonio Canova, *Venus with a Mirror*, ca. 1780-1796. Oil on canvas. 134 x 177 cm. Casa del Canova, Possagno, Italy  
Photo from *Antonio Canova: Arte e Memoria a Possagno*. Ponzano (Treviso): Vianello, 2004. pp. 53-54

- 12 While *Theseus and the Minotaur* is the only sculpture Canova deliberately presented as an antiquity, early in his career he also experimented with painting and its deceptive surface.<sup>19</sup> Sometime in the early 1780s, while at work on the *Monument to Clement XIV*, Canova completed the painting of a Venus, a reclining nude with a mirror, which he subsequently left propped up in an obscure corner of his studio. (Fig. 7) Over time, a “patina” of dust and dirt accumulated on the surface of the painting, giving it the appearance of a much older work.<sup>20</sup> Once rediscovered—and reworked—by him, careful attention to its finish further reiterated the paintings’ supposed antiquity, for “in the ornaments and accessories, [...] slight cracks and other effects of time were skillfully imitated.”<sup>21</sup> When Canova finally showed the painting to his patron Don Abbondio

Rezzonico, a member of the Roman senate and nephew of Clement XIII, and the painter Stefano Tofanelli both of them believed it was a Renaissance work.<sup>22</sup>

- 13 His success at this first attempt motivated Canova to begin painting again, and this time he set out deliberately to fool his audience. Having heard of a lost self-portrait by Giorgione, Canova decided to recreate the work. He obtained a fifteenth-century painting from an antiquarian, a "bad copy of the holy family," and used prints and a literary description as his guide. Canova carefully imitated Giorgione's style, "finishing it in such a way that it appeared to be an old painting."<sup>23</sup> His biographers recount similar tales with regard to at least three different paintings, all of which misled the audience into thinking they were Venetian Renaissance works.<sup>24</sup> These anecdotes are in turn confirmed by private correspondence, including an exchange of letters between Canova and his friend, the Venetian architect Giannantonio Selva, from 1796.<sup>25</sup>
- 14 In every case I have just described, viewers were misled by the element which would so obsess Canova throughout his career—namely, the surface or finishing of the work. It is on the surface of the work where the deception occurs; after all, it was the "finishing" that made Canova's false Giorgione look old. While Canova's ruses were primarily designed as connoisseurship games, the dynamic art market in eighteenth-century Italy, particularly the high demand for ancient sculpture, meant that the deceptive capacity of an art work's surface became increasingly problematic. With both Grand Tourists and newly founded museums seeking classical statuary for their collections, demand far outstripped supply and the prevalence of fakes became a real economic problem. Peter Beckford, on his 1787 trip to Rome, made the financial repercussions of such fraud clear, warning future visitors to the city to beware of copied paintings, antiques "made just for them," and fake medals and pearls.<sup>26</sup> Much more problematic, however, were the fakes that were being institutionalized in the new museums. Works of dubious origin, or fragments that were "restored" into complete objects, were making their way into these institutions, meant to be the bastions of the very best works of art of the ancient world. Although it is true that in the eighteenth century it was only restored and completed objects that were considered for purchase for the museums, it is equally true that restorers and dealers misrepresented the ancient status of certain sculptures in order to make the sale. Recently Giandomenico Spinola has pointed out several modern works that were knowingly sold to the Vatican as antiquities, including a bust of Sabina, and *Herakles Bibax*, purchased in ca. 1775 and 1803, respectively.<sup>27</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, awareness that some works were indeed forgeries penetrated the consciousness of visitors. John Broughton, for instance, turned his critical eye on the Capitoline Museum, lamenting, "The antiquities of the Conservators' palace if they were all authentic, would be the most interesting of Roman remains." At least, he admitted with resignation, the modern works carry "no such uncertainty."<sup>28</sup>
- 15 If the sculptural surface could deceive viewers by creating the aura of antiquity, so too could it suggest the opposite—that is to say, call attention to the work's modernity. Two examples here suffice. *Hebe* and *Penitent Magdalene* were both exhibited at the Parisian Salon of 1808, along with two other works by Canova, *Madame Mère* and *Standing Cupid and Psyche*. The skin of both was, as I have already mentioned, tinted yellow and both also had red lips and cheeks. Moreover, both also had bronze accessories: *Hebe*, for instance, wore a gilded headband and held a golden cup and vase in her hands, while *Penitent Magdalene* ruminated over a bronze cross. Both roused ire in critics. To begin,

Canova's use of bronze was a flashpoint of criticism—Victorin Fabre, writing for the *Mercure de France*, for instance, found Magdalene's cross a "shocking contrast" with the rest of the sculpture.<sup>29</sup> The introduction of metal into a marble work, however, was at least partially justified by a nascent understanding of the use of polychromy in antiquity. In 1804, Quatremère de Quincy, for instance, gave a series of lectures on the subject at the Institut de France, and in 1815 he published an illustrated treatise, *Le Jupiter Olympien*.<sup>30</sup> Ironically, however, while Quatremère defended Canova's use of mixed media by arguing his artistic practice was true to the methods used by the ancients, the same understanding was not extended to the painted surface.<sup>31</sup> Despite literary sources which suggested sculptures were painted, such as Pliny's *Natural History* and Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, not to mention growing archaeological evidence, the use of color was still viewed with suspicion.<sup>32</sup> Augustin Creuze de Lesser, who saw one version of *Hebe* in Canova's studio in 1802 argued that "from the moment one admitted two colors into sculpture, one must admit them all."<sup>33</sup> For other writers, the yellowed skin and pink cheeks and lips reflected Canova's "artifice"<sup>34</sup> and were no more than "trickery and quackery."<sup>35</sup> More worrisome was the way they threatened the status of sculpture itself, a concern repeatedly expressed by critics. For instance, such techniques "were not worthy of sculpture's *gravitas*."<sup>36</sup> The use of color was Canova's misguided attempt "to impart to his statues an air of reality and of heightening their resemblance to nature by artificial means unconnected with the province of sculpture."<sup>37</sup> Polychromy seemed "expressly calculated to heighten the pleasure of the amateur, who is more susceptible of enthusiasm, and frequently measures the perfection of a work by the degree of satisfaction which it affords him."<sup>38</sup> Canova's influence was also to fear: other sculptors might imitate Canova's technique, and in so doing destroy "the noble simplicity, the frankness of composition, and even the very style which form the principal character of great works of sculpture."<sup>39</sup>

- 16 The criticisms leveled at Canova's sculptures in the 1808 Salon echoed the writings of theorists and philosophers across the continent that had been expressed decades earlier. In his *Discourses*, for instance, Joshua Reynolds argued that the admiration of sculpture was rooted in "intellectual pleasure" and the "contemplation of perfect beauty"—the addition of color transformed the art into "mere entertainment to the senses."<sup>40</sup> In 1778, Johann Gottfried Herder claimed that color rendered sculpture "ugly" because sculpture's essence was rooted in form and meant to be experienced through touch.<sup>41</sup> And, of course, in his 1764 *History of the Art of Antiquity*, Winckelmann himself wrote that "color contributes to beauty but is not beauty itself. [...] a beautiful body will be all the more beautiful the whiter it is."<sup>42</sup>
- 17 Common to all these criticisms, be they written by philosophers, theorists, or art critics, was the fear that coloring the marble surface breached the very province of the medium; that is to say, coloring sculpture somehow lessened not just the individual work, but the austerity and seriousness of the art as a whole. Color threatened to make the art of sculpture appealing to a new class of viewers—to "amateurs" who might be pleased—or worse, "entertained"—by the medium. By the early nineteenth century, as the streets of European cities were overrun with spectacles and new forms of popular amusements, there was real danger that sculpture itself might become just one more entertainment among many; the distance between the Salon and the wax museum was perilously small. Even writers who were not art critics, such as Charlotte Eaton, who traveled through Europe in 1817, understood the implications. She objected to the practice of staining marble in a misguided attempt to achieve life, calling it a form of

"charlatanism." "If," she wrote, "however, this painting of statues was introduced in the vain attempt to create a nearer approach to living nature, the objects of sculpture seem to have been strangely mistaken and debased. Most certainly they do not consist in the close imitation of life; for, in that case, a common raree-show of wax-work would exceed the finest sculpture of Phidias."<sup>43</sup>

- 18 Eaton's comments bring me to the final section of this article, in which I'd like to explore this issue of the "close imitation of life." I want to consider the "the reality effect" created by the colored surface in relation to the issue of artificial life, and, more specifically, the suggestion that there might be more underneath sculpture's "skin" than marble alone. The potential to breathe life into inanimate matter revealed itself in two interwoven interests in the eighteenth century, particularly in eighteenth-century France—a profound concern with the Pygmalion myth and philosophical theories of animation. A number of eighteenth-century philosophers—Pierre Bayle, Julien Offray de la Mettrie, and Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac, among others—all reflected on the ability to create life in an inanimate body; this has, in turn, been of great interest to scholars today, as has the erotic relationship between the creator and his animated subject.<sup>44</sup>
- 19 The majority of these eighteenth-century materialist philosophies revolved around a central idea—namely, given that all matter is made of the same atoms, it is only the difference in the structure or arrangement of the atoms that differentiates animate from inanimate objects. It should be possible, therefore, to use some sort of transforming energy to alter the atomic structure of dead, or non-living, matter and produce life. <sup>45</sup> Often, sculptures were used as the example of inanimate matter that could be transformed, presumably because of their lifelike form. In his 1754 *Treatise on the Sensations*, for instance, de Condillac envisioned an experiment in which a statue experiences each of the five senses individually, in succession, and then in combination with one another. In his dedication, he asks us to imagine "a statue constructed internally like ourselves, and animated by a mind which as yet had no ideas of any kind." <sup>46</sup> As the senses are activated by him, the statue experiences cognition and memory; in effect, the statue comes alive. What interests me most about this experiment, however, is the way de Condillac imagines the marble exterior of the statue as a barrier which prevents the use of the senses until it is breached by him. In his vision, the statue is effectively a shell, not a solid, impenetrable mass.
- 20 Given the widespread interest in animation, the concomitant popularity of the Pygmalion myth during the eighteenth century is no surprise. Andreas Blühm cites 142 examples of the myth in theater and the fine arts between 1500-1900, with more than half of them created between 1700-1800.<sup>47</sup> In the myth, best known via Ovid's version, Pygmalion creates the statue of a beautiful woman out of ivory. He is so enamored of her that he caresses her, gives her gifts, and asks Venus for a bride similar to his ivory girl. Venus, hearing his plea, gives the statue life so that the stone "lost its hardness, altering under [Pygmalion's] fingers, as the bees' wax of Hymettus softens in the sun, and is moulded, under the thumb, into many forms [...]." But malleable flesh is not the only way that the statue's animation is recorded—her "pulse throbbed under his thumb" and when he kisses her, she blushes. <sup>48</sup>
- 21 The role coursing blood played as a signifier of life is all the more significant when the background of the Pygmalion myth is considered. What most people don't remember about Ovid's story is the reason Pygmalion makes the statue to begin with: he had been

living as a bachelor, since he was "offended by" the Propoetides, women of the city of Amathus. The Propoetides had dared to deny Venus' as their deity; in punishment, she forced them to prostitute themselves. They lost their sense of shame, and, as a result, their ability to blush; "the blood hardened in their cheeks, and only a small change turned them into hard flints."<sup>49</sup> When their blood stopped circulating, they were, essentially, turned to stone.

- 22 Blushing, I would argue, becomes a symbol for the living body in eighteenth-century versions of the myth. Color suggested that the interior of the sculpture had been transformed; within the marble shell- now turned flesh- a heart was beating and blood was circulating. In paintings of Pygmalion, it became routine to signify Galatea's transformation from sculpture to living woman through the use of pink flesh juxtaposed with white stone. Jean Raoux (1717), Louis-Jean Lagrenée (1777), Laurent Pêcheux (1784), and Louis Gauffier (1797) all rendered the transformative moment the same way; pink stood for vitality, a trope repeated in nineteenth- and twentieth-century depictions of the myth as well—one of the best known, for example, is the painting by Anne-Louis Girodet from 1817, which was itself an homage to Canova. (Fig. 8) But the most dramatic example of the blush as the demarcation between life and death is a historical one. Charlotte Corday, best known, of course, for assassinating the French revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat on July 13, 1793, was guillotined for her crime four days later. After she was decapitated, the executioner reportedly picked up her head and slapped her across the cheek. Corday is said to have blushed in response.<sup>50</sup>



Fig. 8



Anne Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1817. Oil on canvas. 2.53 x 2.02 m.

Musée du Louvre, Paris

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<http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?>

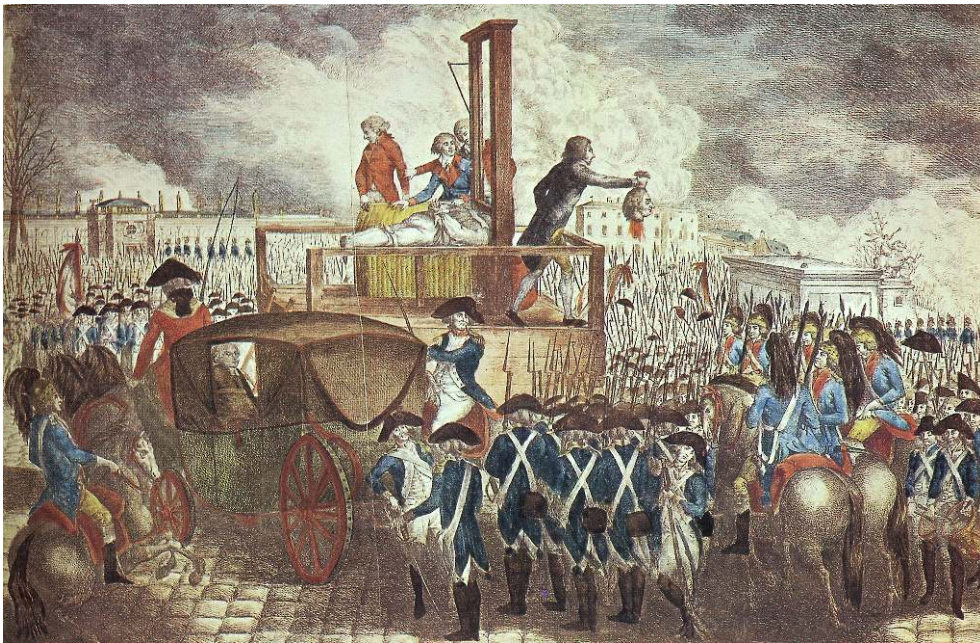
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Accessed 31 March 2015

- 23 Corday's blush may be interpreted both in moral terms—an expression of shame over her crime—and physiological ones,<sup>51</sup> and certainly the incident contributed to debates over how long an individual remained conscious after being decapitated.<sup>52</sup> Moreover it was just one of many gory examples from the Revolutionary period where blood signified the transition from life to death. While this manifested in a blush for Corday, equally striking is the example of the decapitated head of Louis XVI being shown to the crowd; in most of the popular prints of the event, blood is shown streaming from his severed neck. (Fig. 9)



Fig. 9



Georg Heinrich Sieveking, *Execution of King Louis XVI of France, January 21, 1793*. Engraving. Musée Carnavalet, Paris  
 Photo in the public domain  
[http://www2.uncp.edu/home/rwb/louis16\\_execution.jpg](http://www2.uncp.edu/home/rwb/louis16_execution.jpg)  
 Accessed 31 March 2015

- 24 With episodes such as this in mind, then, it is clear that the waxed and colored marbled surface of Canova's works could be interpreted as a skin, beneath which ran the blood of life. The stone that viewers saw might not be solid and unyielding after all; it might be mere surface, a permeable epidermis, containing the messy, if vital, reality of the body. And reactions to Canova's work do suggest an understanding that the surface of his sculptures could be breached. When Giuseppe Lucchesi Palli saw *Venus and Adonis* in 1795, for instance, he was moved to do more than simply touch the work. "The marble is treated with such industriousness," he wrote, "that the surface positively seems to be human skin, and one is tempted to prick it with a pin to see if it bleeds."<sup>53</sup> Augustin Creuze de Lesser's response to the sculpture's polychromy was less complimentary. When he entered the temple that housed the group, he was:

disagreeably struck by a large band, white as snow, that wrapped around the waist of this goddess. I believed at first that it was a cloth with which someone with a ridiculous sense of modesty had covered the sculpture, and I asked to remove it, but when I got closer I saw that Canova had profited from the range of shades that was inherent to the whiteness of the marble in order to conceal his Venus a little. I asked myself what this cloth was doing so close to Adonis. Moreover, white cloth only immediately revealed a Venus that was all gray. Finally that which should have set me straight immediately was that this cloth was positioned in such a way that unless it was held in place by pins stuck in the flesh of Venus herself, it was impossible for it to stay on; but Venus' pose was so tender that one could also imagine that in a moment the veil would fall.<sup>54</sup>

- 25 While it is unclear whether Creuze de Lesser understood that Canova had achieved this effect through waxes and oils, rather than simply taking advantage of the particularities of that piece of marble, both he and Lucchesi Palli read the marble surface as a penetrable skin that could be pierced by pins. The red tint Canova used on

his female sculptures' cheeks and lips could also be misinterpreted. Years later, in response to the 1808 Salon, one critic referred to the way Canova had placed a "rather strong carmine tint on the interior of *Hebe's* mouth."<sup>55</sup> Given that *Hebe's* lips are barely parted, it is likely that this critic misread *Hebe's* "lipstick" as an orifice; in so doing, he suggested that the sculpture's interior was composed of soft tissue.

- 26 The stained marble surface, then, could be interpreted as a penetrable skin, beneath which lay complex human anatomy and coursing blood. This, in turn, could be read in two ways. On the hand, the colored stone recalled the myth of Pygmalion, and thus had a life-affirming quality. Inanimate sculpture held the potential to be animated; it held the potential for life. On the other hand, the hyper-realistic body also threatened the opposite; that is, where there is life, there is also death and decay. Indeed, colored wax had often been used in sculpture for funeral rites; effigies and votives were placed on corpses or left in churches in a tradition that went back to the Renaissance, if not earlier.<sup>56</sup> In the years following the French Revolution, even amusements like Madame Tussaud's waxworks gained their popularity not because of their depiction of living individuals, but rather, their focus on the dead, particularly Louis XVI and martyrs of the Terror.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps even more indicative of way the colored surface—particularly the wax surface—occupied the liminal territory beneath life and death were the anatomical waxes that proliferated during the eighteenth century. These revealed the sculptural surface to be a literal skin—flesh could be removed and the body within placed on display. (Figs. 10-11) Moreover, sometimes they were made from plastinated corpses themselves, freezing the body forever in a tableau that straddled animation and death.

58

Fig. 10



Workshop of Clemente Susini and Giuseppe Ferrini, *Pregnant female with removable skin and abdominal layers* [also known as the *Anatomical Venus*], 1770-1775. Metal or wood skeleton, transparent and colored waxes. Museo di storia natural, sezione zoologica "La Specola", Florence, Italy  
Photo from Lyle Massey, "On Waxes and Wombs: Eighteenth-Century Representations of the Gravid Uterus." In *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, edited by Roberta Panzanelli, 83-105. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2008. pp. 84-85

Fig. 11



Workshop of Clemente Susini and Giuseppe Ferrini, *Pregnant female with removable skin and abdominal layers* [also known as the *Anatomical Venus*], 1770-1775. Metal or wood skeleton, transparent and colored waxes. Museo di storia naturale, sezione zoologica "La Specola", Florence, Italy  
 Photo from Lyle Massey, "On Waxes and Wombs: Eighteenth-Century Representations of the Gravid Uterus". In *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, edited by Roberta Panzanelli, 83-105. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2008. p. 87

- 27 In the eighteenth century, then, the representation of the human body in sculptural form—particularly in polychrome sculptural form—became the focal point for larger aesthetic, philosophical and scientific inquiries. Although by the mid-nineteenth century Charles Baudelaire would declare that sculpture was "boring," the colored surface's oscillation between ancient and modern, flesh and stone, and penetrable and impenetrable reveal that for earlier generations, it was anything but.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, fascination with the deceptive possibilities of the sculptural surface, and the disjunction between a sculpture's surface and its core, have remained a site of exploration for contemporary artists. From Duane Hanson's hyper-realistic sculptures from the 1970s and 80s, in which a lifelike skin created from fiberglass and resin sometimes enfolds a meticulously crafted bronze cast, to Kiki Smith's flayed *Virgin Mary* (1992) which reduces the mother of Christ to her most carnal state, the sculptural surface toes the line between life and death and becomes a site where faith and science, and promise and horror, meet.

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## NOTES

1. Claire J. Farago, ed. *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone: A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1992), 257.

2. Canova's finishing techniques have received much attention recently. See, for instance, Hugh Honour, "Canova's Studio Practice II: 1791-1822," *The Burlington Magazine* 114, no. 829 (April 1972): 218-19; Mark Norman and Richard Cook, "'Just a Tiny Bit of Rouge upon the Lips and Cheeks': Canova, Colour, and the Classical Ideal," in *Canova: Ideal Heads*, ed. Katharine Eustace (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1997), 47-58; Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), esp. "Surface Values," 38-60; Satish Padiyar, *Chains: David, Canova, and the Fall of the Public Hero in Postrevolutionary France*



(University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 119–41; and, more recently, David Bindman, *Warm Flesh, Cold Marble: Canova, Thorvaldsen and Their Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

3. After a visit to Canova's studio in 1799, for instance, Général Baron Thiébault remarked, "Une chose me surprit dans toutes ces statues, c'était la différence de la teinte du marbre qui, dans le même bloc, distinguait la chair et les vêtements. Je pensai que cette différence provenait de la manière de piquer le marbre ou de le polir ; mais Canova me dit qu'il avait découvert une espèce de cire dont il faisait enduire toutes les parties représentant les chairs, et que ce procédé avait non seulement l'avantage de leur donner un velouté nouveau pour le marbre, mais encore de contribuer à préserver ces parties des effets de l'air." Paul Charles François Adrien Henri Dieudonne Thiébault, *Mémoires du General B<sup>on</sup> Thiébault, publiés sous les auspices de sa fille Claire Thiébault, d'après le manuscrit original, par Fernand Calmettes*, 7th ed., 5 vols. (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1893-1895), vol. 2, 549.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. I have also retained the original orthography and phrasing for all citations, including typographical errors.

4. To use Alex Potts' phrase. See Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, 38–60.

5. See Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press), 141–48.

6. For more on *Venus and Adonis*, see the comments by Augustin Creuze de Lesser in note 54. For the full passage recording Thiébault's reaction to his visit to Canova's studio, see note 3.

7. Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, ed. Keith Crook (1813; London; Newark; Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press; Associated University Presses, 2001), 113.

8. For more on the different versions of *Hebe*, see Norman and Cook, "'Just a Tiny Bit of Rouge upon the Lips and Cheeks': Canova, Colour, and the Classical Ideal," 51–52.

9. *Ibid.*, 54–56.

10. One interesting exception is Canova's statue of *Paolina Borghese as Venus Victrix*; recent conservation has shown that Canova did not wax this particular work. See Elisabetta Caracciolo and Elisabetta Zatti, "Il Restauro della Sala di Paolina Bonaparte = the Restoration of the Room of Paulina Bonaparte," in *'Venere Vincitrice': La Sala di Paolina Bonaparte alla Galleria Borghese*, ed. Claudio Strinati (Roma: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1997), 216.

11. According to conservation reports, *Apollo and Daphne* received a waxy patina in the seventeenth century. Whether it was applied by Bernini or not is the subject of some debate. See Kristina Herrmann Fiore, "*Apollo e Dafne* del Bernini al Tempo del Cardinale Scipione Borghese," in *'Apollo e Dafne' del Bernini nella Galleria Borghese*, ed. Kristina Herrmann Fiore and Araldo de Luca (Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 1997), 98. For more on the physical condition of the sculpture and its surface, see the conservation reports in Elisabetta Caracciolo and Elisabetta Zatti, "Il Restauro delle Sculture," *ibid.*, esp. 152 and Alfredo Aldrovandi et al., "*Apollo e Dafne*: Indagini Scientifiche per lo Studio delle Superfici," *ibid.*, 161–69. For *Pluto and Proserpina*, see Genevieve Warwick, *Bernini: Art as Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 109.

In his journal entry on August 13, 1665, Paul Fréart de Chantelou noted the artist's interest in the sculptural surface, particularly the way marble acquired a natural softness with time. See Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Journal de voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France*, ed. Milovan Stanić (Paris: Macula-Insulaire, 2001), 116.

12. See Herrmann Fiore, "*Apollo e Dafne* del Bernini al Tempo del Cardinale Scipione Borghese," 98 and Norman and Cook, "'Just a Tiny Bit of Rouge upon the Lips and Cheeks': Canova, Colour, and the Classical Ideal," 50.

13. Two particularly egregious dealers were Thomas Jenkins and Robert Fagan. See Brinsley Ford, "Thomas Jenkins: Banker, Dealer and Unofficial English Agent," *Apollo* 99, no. 148 (1974): 416–25

and Antonello Cesareo, "‘He Had for Years the Guidance of the Taste in Rome’: Per un Profilo di Thomas Jenkins," in: *Collezionisti, Disegnatori e Teorici dal Barocco al Neoclassico*, ed. Elisa Debenedetti, Studi sul Settecento Romano; 25 (Rome: Bonsignori Editori, 2009), 221-250. For more on Fagan, see Ilaria Bignamini, "I Marmi Fagan in Vaticano: La Vendita del 1804 e Altre Acquisizioni," *Bolletino Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* 16 (1996): 331-94. See also the documents in the Archivio di Stato, Roma, Camerale II, Antichità e Belle Arti, Busta 6, fasc. 175 which denounce Fagan for exporting objects from Rome without permission.

14. See Ascanio Condivi, *Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti* (1553; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1976), 9-12. For a fascinating discussion of Michelangelo as a potential forger, see Lynn Catterson, "Michelangelo's *Laocoön*?" *Artibus et Historiae* 52 (2005): 29-56.

15. As quoted in Honour, "Canova's Studio Practice II: 1791-1822," 219.

16. Noted by Thomas Moore in his diary entry of October 29, 1819, upon a visit to the Museo Pio-Clementino with the sculptor Sir Francis Legatt Chantrey. Thomas Moore, *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, ed. John Russell (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), 235.

17. Augustus von Kotzebue, *Travels through Italy in the Years 1804 and 1805*, 4 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1806), vol. 3, 158-59.

18. J. S. Memes, *Memoirs of Antonio Canova, with a Critical Analysis of his Works, and an Historical View of Modern Sculpture* (Edinburgh: A. Constable & Co., 1825), 295-96. Leopoldo Cicognara likewise recounts this story. Leopoldo Cicognara, *Biografia di Antonio Canova* (Venezia: Editore Giambattista Missiaglia, 1823), 11-12.

Antonio d'Este tells a slightly different version. According to his account, a French sculptor named Suasy often critiqued Canova's style. One morning d'Este ran into Suasy while he was carrying casts the Minotaur's arm and hand and Theseus' foot. After Suasy saw them, not only did he beg to buy them, but he disdainfully suggested that d'Este bring them to Canova so that he might study and learn from the antique. D'Este gleefully replied that the pieces belonged to an original work by Canova himself—a prank that ended d'Este's friendship with Suasy. Antonio d'Este, *Memorie di Antonio Canova*, ed. Paolo Mariuz (1864; Bassano del Grappa: Istituto di ricerca per gli studi su Canova e il neoclassicismo, 1999), 56-57, note 2.

19. That said, throughout his career, Canova often made sculptures that emulated well-known ancient works and exhibited his sculptures in ways that emphasized the comparison with the antique. See, for instance, Antonio Pinelli, "La Sfida Rispettosa di Antonio Canova. Genesi e Peripezie del 'Perseo Trionfante'," *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte* 13/14 (1981): 421-38 and Christina Ferando, "Staging Neoclassicism: Antonio Canova's Exhibition Strategies for *Triumphant Perseus*," in *Das Originale der Kopie: Kopien als Produkte und Medien der Transformation von Antike*, ed. Tatjana Bartsch, et al., Collaborative Research Centre (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 139-63.

20. "Questo quadro restò per più anni in un angolo dello studio, finchè per la patina della polvere e degli anni, prese aspetto di un vecchio quadro." See d'Este, *Memorie di Antonio Canova*, 348.

21. Memes, *Memoirs of Antonio Canova, with a Critical Analysis of his Works, and an Historical View of Modern Sculpture*, 374. See also d'Este, *Memorie di Antonio Canova*, 70 and Faustino Tadini, *Le Sculture e le Pitture di Antonio Canova Pubblicate Fino a quest'Anno 1795* (Venezia: Dalla Stamperia Palese, 1796), 42.

Wendy Wasssyng Roworth also explores the case of Canova's fake Giorgione, including the variations between the biographical accounts. She sets these in the broader context of literary and biographical portrayals of jokes and tricks played by artists and also stresses the importance that Venetian painting held in Rome at the time. See Wendy Wasssyng Roworth, "Pulling Parrhasius's Curtain: Trickery and Fakery in the Roman Art World," in *Regarding Romantic Rome*, ed. Richard Wrigley (Bern; New York: P. Lang, 2007), 17-37. More recently, Ranieri Varese has made a similar argument that these accounts reiterate the importance Venetian art had for Canova. See Ranieri Varese, "Un Falso Giorgione e un Vero Canova," in *Mosaico: Temi e Metodi*

*d'Arte e Critica per Gianni Carlo Sciolla*, ed. Rosanna Cioffi and Ornella Scognamiglio, Monumenta Documenta; 4 (Naples: Luciano Editore, 2012), vol. 1, 353-362.

22. Gilbert Bagnani compares intentionally forged works with "fakes in reverse"—"that of objects or documents which, though undoubtedly not authentic, cannot be considered either as fakes or as forgeries." These works of art—copies, studies, hoaxes, parodies or exercises—were produced by artists and scholars for their own amusement or instruction, without the intention to deceive, and became "fakes" through ignorance and the passage of time. Canova's *Venus with a Mirror* could conceivably fall into this category. See Gilbert Bagnani, "On Fakes and Forgeries," *Phoenix* 14.4 (Winter 1960): 29.

23. "[...] lo termina in modo, che sembrava un vecchio dipinto." See d'Este, *Memorie di Antonio Canova*, 78 and Melchior Missirini, *Della Vita di Antonio Canova: Libri Quattro* (Prato: per i Frat. Giachetti, 1824), 123.

24. For more accounts of Canova's "fakes," see Missirini, *Della Vita di Antonio Canova: Libri Quattro*, 123-25 and Memes, *Memoirs of Antonio Canova, with a Critical Analysis of his Works, and an Historical View of Modern Sculpture*, 373-75.

25. For the reception in Naples of Canova's painting in the manner of Giorgione, see the letters from Ranieri Calzabigi to Canova, April 18, 1795, and from Nicola Passeri to Canova, April 23, 1795, cited in Paola Fardella, *Antonio Canova a Napoli: Tra Collezionismo e Mercato* (Napoli: Paparo, 2002), 28, note 33 and 148-49, respectively. For the rediscovery of Canova's painting, see Marco Nocca, "Un Dipinto Inedito di Antonio Canova Ritrovato a Propaganda Fide: l'Ezzelino da Romano (1793)," *Bolletino Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* 22 (2002):109-36. Canova then arranged for this painting to be sent to Venice, where it would be exhibited without revealing that he was the artist, in order to see how it was received. See the letter from Canova to Giannantonio Selva, May 14, 1796 and the reply from Giannantonio Selva to Canova, May 21, 1796. The original letter from Canova to Selva is in the Biblioteca Correr (PD 529C), but it has been published (with some modifications) in *Lettere Familiari Inedite di Antonio Canova e di Giannantonio Selva. Per le Nozze Persico-Papadopoli* (Venezia: dal premiato stabilimento di G. Antonelli, 1835), 14. The letter from Selva to Canova was published in d'Este, *Memorie di Antonio Canova*, 369.

26. "Artists are chiefly supported by English travellers, who usually follow Mr. GRAY's advice, and buy every thing which is to be bought: and among other curiosities, copies for original pictures; and antiques made on purpose for them. Would you buy pictures, beware of counterfeits, and remember *Andrea*. Medals will also be brought to you in quantities, which science requires some caution also. It is the rarity that fixes the value: you would not think, perhaps, that an Otho in copper, is worth more than an Otho in gold.

False pearls are made here in the greatest perfection. If not too large, they may pass at a distance for real ones, and at any rate will answer the purpose full as well. The pearls CLEOPATRA wore were esteemed at one hundred and sixty-one thousand four hundred and fifty-eight pounds.—How much better might that money have been employed!" Peter Beckford, *Familiar Letters from Italy, to a Friend in England*, 2 vols. (Salisbury: Printed and sold by J. Easton, 1805), vol. 2, 317-18.

27. Giandomenico Spinola, "La Manipolazione dell'Antico tra Restauro e Falso: Esempi dai Musei Vaticani," in *Roma e l'Antico: Realtà e Visione nel '700*, ed. Carolina Brook and Valter Curzi (Milano: Skira, 2010), 52.

28. Emphasis added. He continues, "...But many of the names given to the marbles and bronzes in this quarter of the Capitol are more than questionable. The Duillian column is modern, and the fragments of inscriptions on it are copies; the colossal bronze fragments, said to belong to a statue of Commodus, are not certainly his. The Geese called the saviours of the Capitol may be ancient, but they look like ducks. The Boy extracting the thorn is not what it is called, the Shepherd Martius; the bronze Junius Brutus is a baptism; the Caesar is a forgery; so are the Appius Claudius, the Mithridates, the Ariadne, the Sappho, the Virgil, the Cicero, and the Poppæa. No such uncertainty attaches to the collection of modern worthies on the Promoteca,

many of them removed from the Pantheon; but most of the recent busts were supplied by the munificence of Canova." John Cam Hobhouse Broughton, *Italy; Remarks Made in Several Visits, from the Year 1816 to 1854*, 2 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1859), vol. 2, 39.

29. "Ces accessoires, ainsi colorés, me semblent faire une disparate choquante avec le reste de la statue [...]." Victorin Fabre, "Salon de peinture. Huitième article. Sculptures," *Mercure de France, journal historique, politique et littéraire* (24 Decembre 1808): 604. For the rest of the citation, see note 39. Fabre's reaction was based in part on the polychromy and in part on the luxuriousness of the bronze, which was at odds with Magdalene's pious renunciation of worldly goods.

30. See Antoine-Chrysosthème Quatremère de Quincy, *Le Jupiter Olympien, ou, l'art de la sculpture antique considéré sous un nouveau point de vue* (Paris: de Bure Frères Libraires du Roi et de la Bibliothèque du Roi, 1815). For more on Quatremère's interest in polychromy, see Yvonne Luke, *Quatremère de Quincy's Role in the Revival of Polychromy in Sculpture* (Leeds: Centre for the Study of Sculpture, Henry Moore Institute, 1996).

31. "Quelques-uns se sont recriés sur l'emploi que M. Canova a fait d'un peu de dorure dans l'enjolivement de la ceinture de son Hebé, et sur l'application du métal doré à quelques-uns de ses accessoires. Cette critique ne peut être faite sérieusement que par des personnes peu versées dans la connaissance historique de la sculpture antique, ou qui ne se sont formé l'idée de toutes les variétés que par un petit nombre de marbres. L'habitude d'introduire soit des couleurs, soit des matieres diverses dans les statues, fait une des habitudes favorites de l'antiquité. S'il le fallait, on prouverait que loin de ramener l'art vers le mauvais goût des tems barbares; cet essai de M. Canova le rapproche au contraire, et de la manière et des ertemens pratiqués par les maîtres des plus beaux siècles de la Grèce. Sans doutes, et on l'avouera sans peine, ce n'est pas par-là que le statuaire doit ambitionner le don de plaire. Si beaucoup de marbres antiques portent encore des marques d'une parure étrangère à leur matière, si la Vénus de Médecis, par exemple, eut les cheveux dorés, on n'en conclura point qu'il faille imiter par-là l'antique. Mais si ces licenses qui peuvent être subordonnés au goût, sont autorisées par une multitude d'exemples, on en conclura, et que M. Canova a pu se les permettre dans un sujet léger, et que si on l'en blâme, ce ne doit pas être sur-tout par les motifs qu'on a allégués." Antoine-Chrysosthème Quatremère de Quincy, "Sur M. Canova et les quatre ouvrages qu'on voit de lui à l'exposition publique de 1808: par M. Quatremère de Quincy [sic]," *Gazette nationale ou le moniteur universel*, no. 565 (Dec. 28, 1808): 1429.

32. In Pliny's *Natural History*, for instance, he cites Praxiteles' admiration for the painter Nicias, who also painted Praxiteles' own sculptures. Vitruvius, on the other hand, suggests wax was used to tint marble sculptures. See Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, ed. H. Rackham, trans. H. Rackham (vols. 1-5, 9), W.H.S. Jones (vols. 6-8), and D.E. Eichholz (vol. 10), 10 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, 1949-54), XXXV, lx, <http://www.masseiana.org/pliny.htm#BOOK%20XXXV> (accessed June 30, 2015) and Vitruvius, *The Architecture of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio in Ten Books*, ed. and trans. Joseph Gwilt, 1826, VII, 9, 3, <http://lexundria.com/vitr/7.9/gw> (accessed June 30, 2015).

33. "Elle tient à la main une coupe dorée, idée que je n'approuve rien, quoique les anciens l'aient eue souvent. Du moment qu'on admet deux couleurs dans la sculpture, il faut les admettre toutes. Dès que vois me montrez une coupe d'or, je trouve difforme et avec raison une bouche toute blanche, des yeux tout blancs: en un mot une seule couleur, ou toutes les couleurs." Augustin Creuze de Lesser, *Voyage en Italie et en Sicile, fait en MDCCCI et MDCCCII* (Paris: de l'Imprimerie de P. Didot l'Ainé, 1806), 313.

34. "Le bandeau des cheveux de la Déesse [*Hebe*], l'aiguière et la coupe qu'elle teint dans ses mains, sont de couleur d'or; les parties nues de la statue sont imprégnées d'une préparation de soufre et de cire, qui leur donne une teinte jaunâtre et un reflet assez semblable à celui des corps demi-diaphanes, comme certaines partes de l'albâtre: cet encaustique a même sur quelques

parties du visage une couleur légèrement rosée; et cependant les draperies conservent la blancheur naturelle du marbre.

Ce sont ces petits artifices que nous eussions pu remarquer plus tôt, en parlant de la Madeleine et du groupe de Psyché, que l'on reproche au chevalier Canova, comme peu dignes de la gravité de la statuaire. En admirant l'adresse et la discrétion avec laquelle il les emploie, on craint que l'abus n'en devienne un jour funeste. On invite les sculpteurs à repousser une prétendue innovation, qui n'est en effet que le raffinement du procédé ordinaire aux artistes des siècles de barbarie: toutes ces observations me semblent forte justes.

Les anciens ont employé l'or, l'argent, les pierreries, la marqueterie dans quelques-unes de leurs statues de marbre. Les anciens n'ont-ils pas eu aussi leurs âges d'ignorance et leurs siècles d'un luxe barbare? Nous ne voyons pas cette bigarrure dans ceux de leurs plus beaux ouvrages que le temps a respectés; et quel elle s'y trouveroit, cette autorité ne sauroit prévaloir contre le bon sens et la raison.

À la vue d'un ouvrage de sculpture, nous nous figurons le sujet représenté sous un seul de ses rapports, celui de la solidité. Cette seule propriété, imitée plus ou moins parfaitement, suffit pour nous donner une idée distincte du sujet entier; et elle satisfait si bien notre esprit, qu'à peine nous nous apercevons de l'absence de toutes les autres.

Cependant, que par un soin imprudent l'artiste accorde à quelque partie de sa statue une de ces autres propriétés qui manquent à tout le reste, nous sommes frappés de la différence; et notre pensée, d'abord tout occupée d'un seul objet, prend un autre tour.

La blancheur du lin, si facilement imitée par la blancheur du marbre, nous fera songer à l'inimitable couleur de la chair. Le diadème, brillant d'or véritable, accusera la feinte impuissante de l'art à l'égard des cheveux. Et que le sculpteur égaré dans cette fausse voie n'espère pas s'en tirer en poursuivant: au bout est le terme fatal de l'art. " M.B., "Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1808. N. XVIII. Sculpture. M. Canova," 3-4.

35. "Again—there is a trickery and quackery in the finishing of Canova's statues, which is below the dignity of a sculptor. The marble is not left in its natural state—but it must be stained and polished to aid the effect. The other sculptors laugh at this, and well they may;—for these adventitious graces soon fade away, and are beside the purpose of sculpture, whose end was, and is, to represent *form* alone." Henry Matthews, *The Diary of an Invalid, Being the Journal of a Tour in Pursuit of Health, in Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, and France, in the Years 1817, 1818, and 1819*, 5th ed. (Paris: A. and W. Galignani and co., 1836), 89.

36. See note 37 for the full text. M.B., "Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1808. N. XVIII. Sculpture. M. Canova," 3-4.

37. The anonymous writer of *The New Monthly Magazine* cited these criticisms, but ultimately defended Canova's work. "Canova has been blamed by some critics for endeavouring to impart to his statues an air of reality, and of heightening their resemblance to nature by artificial means unconnected with the province of sculpture: namely by colouring the eyes, lips &c., a practice quite unusual among modern sculptors. This, however, he manages with so much delicacy, that it is scarcely perceptible, and if it do not, as many maintain, impart an additional charm to the statue, it is at least certain that Canova never suffers the colouring to obtrude so as to become offensive to the eye." "Memoir of Antonio Canova [with a Portrait]," *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* 13 (Jan. 1, 1820): 71.

38. "Canova strives, by the kind of polish which he gives to his works, to produce in the spectator an impression corresponding with that which the subject of his compositions ought to inspire. He gives to the marble the appearance of a soft and delicate substance, and when it has received the last polish, by means of the pumice-stone, he makes use of a mordant, to diminish its whiteness, and to give it somewhat of a yellowish tint. The connoisseurs who love to find in a statue the beauty of the form designed with the utmost possible purity, do not approve of this process, by which it would seem to be impaired; but it is expressly calculated to heighten the pleasure of the

amateur, who is more susceptible of enthusiasm, and frequently measures the perfection of a work by the degree of satisfaction which it affords him." English translation from Carl Ludwig Fernow, "Account of the Life and Works of M. Canova, the Celebrated Italian Sculptor," *The Monthly Magazine, or, British Register* XXIV, no. 160 (August 1, 1807): 47.

39. "Cet habile statuaire [Canova] se sert, avec beaucoup d'adresse, d'un moyen peu usité, pour donner plus de douceur à ses chairs et les mieux distinguer des draperies. Il jaunit le marbre dans le nu, et lui laisse sa couleur naturelle dans les étoffes. Les avis peuvent être partagés sur cette espèce d'innovation, mais M. Canova est allé plus loin encore : on trouve dans ses statues d'autres accessoires représentés en couleur; telles sont la coupe d'or de son *Hébé*, la croix de roseau de sa *Madelaine*. Ces accessoires ainsi colorés, me semblent faire une disparate choquante avec le reste de la statue, ôter à la vraisemblance et à l'illusion de l'ensemble plus peut-être qu'ils n'ajoutent à la vérité des détails; et je crois qu'un tel usage, dont il serait si facile à des imitateurs maladroits d'abuser, pourrait, s'il venait un jour à s'établir, altérer enfin la noble simplicité, la franchise de composition, et même de style qui doivent former toujours le principal caractère des grands ouvrages de sculpture." Fabre, "Salon de peinture. Huitième article. Sculptures," 604.

40. "If the business of Sculpture were to administer pleasure to ignorance, or a mere entertainment to the senses, the Venus of Medicis might certainly receive much improvement by colour; but the character of Sculpture makes it her duty to afford delight of a different, and, perhaps, of a higher kind; the delight resulting from the contemplation of perfect beauty: and this, which is in truth an intellectual pleasure, is in many respects incompatible with what is merely addressed to the senses." Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art Ltd. by Yale University Press, 1997), 176-77.

41. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, ed. and trans. Jason Gaiger (1778; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 54.

42. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, ed. Alex Potts, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave, Texts & Documents (1764; Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 195.

43. Charlotte A. Eaton, *Rome, in the Nineteenth Century; Containing a Complete Account of the Ruins of the Ancient City, the Remains of the Middle Ages, and the Monuments of Modern Times*, 5th ed., 2 vols. (1820; London: H. G. Bohn, 1852), vol. 2, 301.

44. This interest in animation remained powerful well into the nineteenth century. Recent scholarship which has explored the issue includes J. L. Carr, "Pygmalion and the *Philosophes*: the Animated Statue in Eighteenth-Century France," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23, no. 3/4 (Jul-Dec. 1960): 239-55; Victor Ieronim Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock*, The Louise Smith Bross Lectures (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); Kelly Dennis, *Art/Porn: A History of Seeing and Touching* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009), esp. 37-53; George L. Hersey, *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Marquard Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

45. See Hersey, *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present*, 99-102 and Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*, 39.

46. "For this purpose, we imagined a statue constructed internally like ourselves, and animated by a mind which as yet had no ideas of any kind. We supposed the marble exterior of the statue to prevent the use of its senses, and we reserved to ourselves the right to open them at will to the different impressions of which they are susceptible." Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Condillac's 'Treatise on the Sensations'*, ed. and trans. Margaret Geraldine Spooner Carr (1754; London: The Faval Press, 1930), xxx-xxxi.

47. As cited in Hersey, *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present*, 102.

48. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Anthony S. Kline, Book X, 243-297, "Orpheus Sings: Pygmalion and the Statue," <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph10.htm> (accessed June 30, 2015).
49. *Ibid.*, Book X, 220-242, "Orpheus Sings: The Propoetides," <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph10.htm> (accessed June 30, 2015).
50. Some contemporary reports suggest that Corday was not, in fact, slapped. Regardless of the historical accuracy of the account, the image entered the entered public imagination and was still actively discussed for several years after her execution. For more details, see Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 118-20.
51. *Ibid.*, 119.
52. Daniel Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror*, trans. Christopher Miller (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1989), esp. 37-42.
53. Letter from Lucchesi Palli to Canova, n.d. [1795]. "Il marmo è trattato con tale industria, che la superficie sembra positivamente l'epiderma del corpo umano e si sarebbe tentati pungerla con una spilla per vedere se ne uscisse il sangue." Cited in Fardella, *Antonio Canova a Napoli: Tra Collezionismo e Mercato*, 145.
54. "J'ai vu à Naples un autre essai de ce système de Canova, et beaucoup moins heureux encore à mon avis ; c'est dans un groupe de Vénus et Adonis. Vénus est nue ; mais quand j'entrai dans la pièce où est ce groupe, je fus désagréablement frappé d'une large bande, blanc de neige, qui entourait la ceinture de cette déesse. Je crus que c'étoit une lingé dont une pudeur assez ridicule l'avoit couverte, et je priai qu'on l'ôtât ; mais en m'approchant je vis que Canova avoit profité, pour masquer un peu sa Vénus, d'une variété de teinte qui existoit dans la blancheur du marbre. Je me demandai ce que ce lingé avoit là à faire auprès d'Adonis ; de plus un lingé blanc me montra tout de suite une Vénus toute grise. Au reste ce qui auroit dû me détromper tout de suite, c'est que ce lingé est posé tellement qu'à moins de supposer qu'il tient par des épingles à la personne même de Vénus, il est impossible qu'il tienne; mais aussi Vénus est dans une disposition si tendre qu'on peut supposer que dans ce moment là le voile alloit achever de tomber." Creuze de Lesser, *Voyage en Italie et en Sicile, fait en MDCCCI et MDCCCII*, 313-14.
55. "Quand M. Canova lui-même emprunterait la palette du Titien, pour ajouter dans toutes les parties de ses figures la couleur à la forme, l'imitation parfaite de ses deux propriétés ne servirait qu'à faire sentir plus vivement l'absence d'une troisième. Ces simulacres d'hommes, auxquels il ne manqueroit plus rien que la vie, seroient par cela seul un objet horrible. Sans doute M. Canova est loin, bien loin de cet excès de barbarie ; cependant je ne crois pas que la teinte, assez forte, de carmin qu'il a donné à l'intérieur de la bouche de son Hébé, soit aux yeux de personne d'un effet agréable; et l'analogie est assez grande entre ce procédé et celui que nous venons de supposer, pour justifier les reproches ou du moins les craintes des amis des arts." M.B., "Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1808. N. XVIII. Sculpture. M. Canova," 4.
56. See, for instance, Roberta Panzanelli, "Compelling Presence: Wax Effigies in Renaissance Florence," in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 13-39 and Joris van Gastel, "Life, But Not as We Know It: Wax Images and the Denial of Death," in *Bildakt at the Warburg Institute*, ed. Sabine Marienberg and Jürgen Trabant (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2014), 231-51.
57. Uta Kornmeier, "Almost Alive: The Spectacle of Verisimilitude in Madame Tussaud's Waxworks," in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 67-81.
58. Joan B. Landes, "Wax Fibers, Wax Bodies, and Moving Figures: Artifice and Nature in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy," *ibid.*, 41-65.
59. Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846," *Art in Paris, 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions*, ed. Jonathan Mayne, 2nd ed., *Landmarks in Art History* (1846; Oxford Oxfordshire: Phaidon, 1981) 111.



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## ABSTRACTS

In the eighteenth century, sculptors such as Antonio Canova often experimented with polychromy, using wax or grind water to subtly tint their figures' flesh. In this article, I examine viewers' discomfort with these surface treatments. I argue that viewers reacted negatively to the colored surface of works such as *Hebe* and *Penitent Magdalene* because they found it to be deceptive. First, encaustic treatments mellowed the marble surface, giving modern works the appearance of antiquities. Second, the "reality effect" created by color threatened sculpture's status as high art. Finally, hyper-realism also suggested that the sculpture's surface was exactly that—that is to say, only a surface, a shell that contained the messy reality of the body. The polychrome surface therefore oscillated between ancient and modern, flesh and stone, penetrable and impenetrable and raised larger aesthetic, philosophical and scientific issues.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Antonio Canova, eighteenth-century sculpture, polychromy, surface, illusionism, deception

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